

Course: CTWR 413: Writing the Short Script 1
Units: 2
Time: WEDNESDAY, 10:00a-12:50p
Location: SCA 310
Section #: 19342D

Instructor: Anne Postman
Email: apmcinty@usc.edu
Office hours: *by appointment*

COURSE GOALS:

- Introduction to the craft of screenwriting
- To learn and practice the elements of “a good story well-told”
- To strengthen and deepen the ability to conceive of compelling ideas, characters and stories through experience and observation
- To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective—that is, cinematically
- To learn narrative structure
- To learn the building blocks of the dramatic scene
- To write a short screenplay

This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will learn and develop your craft as a storyteller. You will learn to draw on your memories, experiences, observation, and, of course, your imagination, to create compelling characters and stories for the screen.

This is a workshop class. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both in and outside the class, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn how to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you write it, developing and exploring your characters through situations of conflict.

At the end of the class you will apply your skills to writing TWO short narrative CTPR 310 scripts (5 pages each).

READING:

Read as many screenplays as possible to familiarize yourself with the styles and form of other professional writers. **You will be assigned one script to read on your own time and complete an assignment on it.** We have a selection of scripts posted on our class Blackboard site. Additionally, the following texts are suggested:

Crafting Short Screenplays that Connect, by Claudia Hunter Johnson

GRADING:

6 Writing Prompt Assignments (6 points each) = **36 points**

Screenplay Reading Assignment = **6 points**

310 Pitches = **5 points**

Revised 310 Pitches = **5 points**

SHORT SCRIPT 1 (3 drafts) = **21 points**

SHORT SCRIPT 2 (3 drafts) = **21 points**

Class Participation = **6 points**

Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading the assignments of the other students (often in advance) and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory and requires that you be punctual to ensure that all students get an equal amount of time for feedback and discussion of their work.

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A	100% to 94%	C	76% to 73%
A-	93% to 90%	C-	72% to 70%
B+	89% to 87%	D+	69% to 67%
B	86% to 83%	D	66% to 63%
B-	82% to 80%	D-	62% to 60%
C+	79% to 77%	F	59% to 0%

Expectation of Professionalism:

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proofread your assignment prior to submission. *Scripts not conforming to these guidelines cannot receive a grade in the A range.*

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

Recording Devices:

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

No open laptops allowed on the table. Bring a pad of paper and a pen to take notes. Assignments will be projected on the screen via Blackboard for all discussions and read-alouds. Cell phones must be off (or silent) and out of view in backpacks.

***Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

“Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class.

“On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Two late arrivals equate to one full absence.

“Note: This is a change in policy. Instructors will no longer distinguish between an excused or unexcused absence. An absence will be an absence.

“Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

“If you have an emergency and/or know you will miss class please email your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

“If a student has an emergency and additional accommodations are needed, those accommodations will need to come through the USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) office. The Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.”

SUBMITTING WORK:

Each week, you will submit your work two ways:

1. To the Discussion Forum (on Blackboard)
2. To the Assignments site (on Blackboard)

Use professional screenwriting software. I recommend Final Draft. Let me know if you need help getting set up with screenwriting software.

Please do not email me your assignments. *If your assignment is late, submit it to Blackboard as instructed above and email me a note when it is posted.*

ASSIGNMENTS & SCHEDULE:

Please note: each assignment is **due** the week it is described. For example, your “Exploring Character” assignment described under WEEK TWO (Jan. 22nd) is also due Jan. 22nd.

WEEK 1 - JAN 15: Prose – “CINEMATIC WRITING”

Part 1: PLACE, ATMOSPHERE, VISUALIZATION

Creating a sense of place and atmospheric locations are part of the writer’s job. Lighting, time of day, weather, architecture, use of sound, props and objects all help create mood and the world of your story.

In-class assignment – TRIP TO SCHOOL

- List the places you went to school starting as far back as you can remember.
- List how you got to each school.
- List things, places, activities, people, clothes connected with that trip.

Describe the most emotionally charged trip you remember. Feel free to use bullet points, as you will be telling about the trip rather than reading a description.

Part 2: CONNECTING TO SELF – LE MENU

In order to create work of any worth, an artist must have something to say, some values, some attitudes, some store of experience—a vision. And an artist must identify those attitudes before they will ever energize a work of value.

What I Love	What I Hate	What I Fear	What I Believe	What I Value	What I Want	What I Know About	People who made a difference in my life	Discoveries that made a difference in my life	Decisions that made a difference in my life

Write 5 answers to each statement. Do not write your name on your paper. Bring to class next week.

Choose a feature screenplay to read. No television scripts, please. Must be approved by me, so email me with your choice. Start reading!

WEEK 2 - JAN 22: Prose – “EXPLORING CHARACTER”

Creating a screen character is one of the most challenging and important tasks of the screenwriter. We will discuss several elements of that task, including attuning your ear to how people actually talk, and looking at some of the ways character is revealed through action.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: *Go to a public place and observe people. Focus on someone you find interesting. Turn on your Voice Memo app and record their conversation. You might have to try this a few times before you capture a good conversation. Type up the conversation VERBATIM in prose. DO NOT USE FRIENDS for this assignment.*

Length: 2-3 pages.

CASE STUDY: *City Lights*. The dramatic “dance” of the 5 D’s: desire, discovery, deliberation, decision, doing.

Continue reading your chosen Screenplay.

WEEK 3 - JAN 29: Scene – “PREPARATION FOR A DATE or SIGNIFICANT EVENT”

Designed to build audience engagement and expectations. Introduces the use of props, costume, and character-revealing activity and action. Helps the writer practice time ellipsis, the technique of planting and payoff, and/or repetition with a variation. And, of course, **preparation and aftermath**. In two scenes.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: *Pick an interesting character and place them alone in a location significant to them. Show the character preparing for an important event, such as a crucial job interview, a romantic liaison, a murder, whatever. The point is to show through props and action not only what the event is, but how the character feels about what's about to happen. Give us glimpses into the character's hopes and fears. It should be crystal clear what the event is when the character leaves the location.*

Then, jump time (with a new scene heading) and show the character's return. (Remember, we never see the primary scene of the event.) But when the character returns to the location, we should know exactly what happened and how the character feels about it by changes in demeanor, costume, props, etc.

Length: 1-page total. Must be written in screenplay format and uploaded as a PDF.

IN-CLASS WRITING: The Mood Exercise.

Continue reading your chosen Screenplay.

WEEK 4 - FEB 5: Dialogue Script – Paradigm 1: “THE DISCOVERY”

Discuss “discovery scenes” in movies. Compare and analyze. If you can write a good discovery, you can write a good screenplay.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Write a screenplay about a character making a discovery that makes a difference to the character. Make sure the discovery – the precise moment of change – is clearly rendered on paper and therefore on screen. The audience must understand the difference the discovery makes to your character. They must be able to see the shift, however subtle, in your character’s life.

Length: 3 pages.

ALSO DUE: Screenplay Craft Assignment.

WEEK 5 - FEB 12: Dialogue Script – Paradigm 2: “THE DECISION”

Discoveries are often beyond our control, but decisions are not. They come from our experiences, values, and worldview. Decisions reveal who we are and shape who we become. In screenplays, a character’s biggest decisions are often the story turning points.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Write a screenplay about a character making a decision that makes a difference to the character. The decision – the *precise* moment of change – must be rendered on paper, i.e. on screen. The audience must understand the decision.

Length: 4 pages.

WEEK 6 - FEB 19: Dialogue Scene -- Paradigm 3: “THE IMPROBABLE CONNECTION”

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Write a screenplay about two characters who initially feel no connection whatever – a connection between them is, in fact, highly improbable – but by the end of the screenplay they have come to feel an authentic connection. Think stepping stones... discoveries and decisions your characters make that bring them closer together. Moments of change.

Length: 4 pages.

Special Note: CTPR 310 TEACHERS WILL VISIT FOR 20 MINUTES DURING WEEK 6 TO GIVE AN INTRODUCTION TO THEIR CLASS.

From here on out, you will be developing your two 310 Scripts. We will be dividing the class into 2 groups (GROUP A and GROUP B) and workshopping half the scripts on alternating weeks. This will allow a greater depth of discussion.

Feel free to use one of the paradigms from our previous weeks, or the new one (“Boxing Match”) below. These paradigms, used in many stories, provide a basic dramatic framework and compel you to develop stories with stakes, motivation, tension, and meaning. Don’t forget the importance of telling your story cinematically, with strong visuals, locations, atmosphere and sounds.

Paradigm 4: “THE BOXING MATCH”

Write a screenplay about a character (A) who wants something badly that a second character (B) does not want to give. A’s want must be clear. And we have to understand why A wants it (stakes). What’s lost if A doesn’t get it? Must be clear why B doesn’t want to give it. Let A fail at least once, regroup, and try again. Let’s see your character’s energy and resourcefulness; let’s see her/him try more than one strategy. Show the dance of desire, discovery, deliberation, decision, and doing. Escalate the drama. Outcome must be clear. Success or failure?

WEEK 7 - FEB 26: PITCHING 310 IDEAS. All Students pitch 2 ideas to class for SCRIPT 1.

WEEK 8 - MAR 4: GROUP A presents SCRIPT 1 First Drafts

WEEK 9 - MAR 11: GROUP B presents SCRIPT 1 First Drafts

MARCH 14 - MARCH 22 -- SPRING BREAK -- NO CLASS

**WEEK 10 - MAR 25: GROUP A presents SCRIPT 1 Second Drafts;
GROUP B presents SCRIPT 2 Pitches.**

**WEEK 11 - APR 1: GROUP B presents SCRIPT 1 Second Drafts;
GROUP A presents SCRIPT 2 Pitches.**

WEEK 12 - APR 8: GROUP A presents SCRIPT 2 First Drafts.

WEEK 13 - APR 15: GROUP B presents SCRIPT 2 First Drafts.

WEEK 14 - APR 22: GROUP A presents SCRIPT 2 Second Drafts.

**WEEK 15 - APR 29: GROUP B presents SCRIPT 2 Second Drafts.
Course Evaluations completed in class.**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 6TH at 10AM - BOTH FINAL, POLISHED SCRIPTS MUST
BE POSTED ON THE BLACKBOARD ASSIGNMENTS FORUM.**

Scripts MUST conform to required CTPR 310 parameters and be no more than 6 pages each. Please proofread and check for grammar, spelling and format errors. It may be helpful to copy and paste your script into a Word Document to check for highlighted errors, as Word is better able to catch such errors than most script writing software.

CONGRATULATIONS, AND HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.

<https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail diversity@cinema.usc.edu. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

Disruptive Student Behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

PLEASE NOTE:

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY
INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**